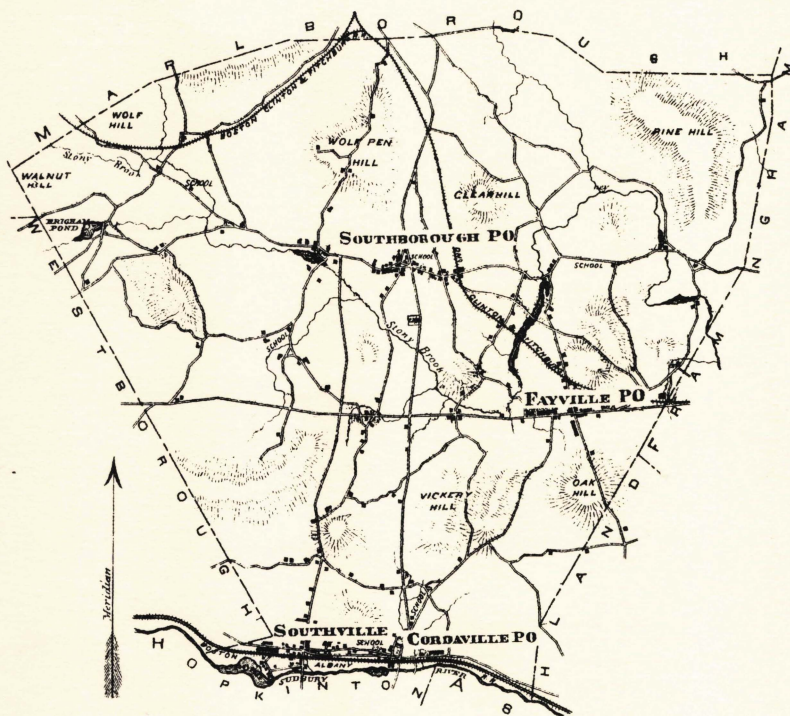


Our Town *275th Anniversary*

Chronicles • Recollections • Poetry



SOUTHBOROUGH

Excerpted from advertisers map of Our Town, circa 1870

Rev. Robert G. Howes

AGE QUOD AGIS

(whatever you do, do it well, do it thoroughly)

Motto of St. Marks School

Origins
Quick Chronicle
Personal Recollect
Indigenous Poetry

In memoriam

*This book is dedicated to my parents and grandparents;
to my sister Mary and to my brothers Richard and Peter,
all of whom lie buried in Southborough soil.*

Introduction

My purpose here is to identify and memorably to say certain key persons and happenings in Our Town as we celebrate 275 years of commonwealth and 150 years at the present (Fay) library.

I was born and bred in Southborough, son of the Postmaster.

My maternal grandfather came out from County Galway; on my father's side I am a Mayflower descendant. I thus carry and cherish in my own bones and spirit both the immigrant and the old "Yankee" genes which have nourished our New England so well since Plimoth. Much of what I record, then, is first hand and this booklet is a labor of indigenous love!

For the bulk of pre-1990 dates and data I owe a great debt to "Fences of Stone"(1990) and its inimitable author Richard (Nick) Noble. I am most grateful to Nick for permission to cite from "Fences". My own chronicle up to 1990 is in the main, but by no means entirely, attributable to his prior research.

I am also grateful to the several elder citizens I've interviewed, to my friend Town Clerk Paul Berry and his associates in the Town House, to the librarians at St Marks, to "The Southborough Villager", in memoriam to Sadie Stivers Hutt and to her successor Judith Williams and the staff at our (Fay) library. S K O A L

Our Town

(275)

This is Our Town,
these old maples, these oaks,
these perimeters of pine,
this roundelay of water,
these ragged glacier rocks,
this robust commonwealth.

Here in this kind country
we've time at least a little to abstain
from the terribilities of Time,
sit compassionate of seasons
and, greatly grateful of Providence,
speculate on the wisdom, wit
and wonder of the world.

This is Our Town
these two milestones
this Reservoir, these hills
(from which we can see
the North Star and sometimes Boston)
with steeples in between
signifying concentric absolutes
and sweet dependencies.

Here in this plain paradise
we old, we new, we middlers
share and build in patient purpose
like farmer folk
putting Spring stones
together side by side
along a common boundary.

This is Our Town
this peaceful place, this oasis
in the turmoil of a Global Village.
this Pilgrim-reverent realm
where fundamental things,
for all the commotions
all the rush and roar around us,
stand as sturdy still
as when they landed once
on a stern and rockbound coast
not very far away.

*An Ode Composed for
Southborough's 275th Anniversary*

(REVISES AN EARLIER VERSION)

Origins

Southborough in the main is the grand-daughter of Sudbury via mother Marlborough. Some of what is now Cordaville and Southville was, however, once part of Framingham and was known as Fiddleneck (annexed to Southborough some 40 years later).

There were 50 families in the Southborough area when the town was established. The reason for the separation from Marlborough was inconvenient "distance from the place of Public Worship."

Founding dates; Southborough July 17, 1727 (8,828 acres), Sudbury 1638, Marlborough 1660, Westborough 1717, Northborough (from Westborough) 1768. Natick in 1651 was the first "praying Indian" town through the influence and under the auspices of John Eliot.

The area was known as Ockoocangansett. The Indians were Algonquin-Nipmucks. A group of Sudbury men led by John Ward in 1654 went west to seek space for more settlers. They called the area they prospected Whipsufferedge. In 1656 it was officially opened to settlement though Eliot retained 8000 acres for his praying Indians.

One of those with Ward was Peter Bent, then 21. He explored the southern portion of the Whipsufferedge Plantation and a few years later built a mill on Stony Brook. Part of Southborough was once known as "cow commons" and all of it later as Stony Brook. The border between Hopkinton and Southborough was set along the Sudbury River which flows from Westborough into the Charles River. In the 1890's, 23% of the town's land mass was taken by the Metropolitan District Commission for "The Reservoir".

POPULATION

At time of Revolution less than 800

1820 - 1,000 residents

1840 - 2,000 residents

1870 - 2,133 residents

1980 - 7,528 residents

2001 - 8,800 residents (est.)

Churches

A recent Harvard graduate, Rev Nathaniel Stone was the town minister from 1731-1781. He was a native of Harwich where his father was minister and he maintained close contact there.

As town minister his starting salary per year was \$300 plus 500 cords of wood. He was active in the Marlborough Association (of area clergy). He was succeeded by Rev Samuel Simmer from Shrewsbury (1791-1797).

The Southborough Pilgrim Congregational church was dedicated in 1834, the Southville church in 1865 and the Southville Methodist church in 1897. Southville Methodists and Congregationalists became federated in 1927. The Baptist church at White's Corner, burned in 1915. A second church was built in Fayville in 1921. The Baptist Chapel of the Holy Cross on Cordaville Rd in the old Suydam house was established in 1968.

Rev Patrick Cudahy, Roman Catholic, from Milford offered the first mass in Wilson Hall above what became the old Fitzgerald store in 1861. The churches St Matthew in Cordaville and St Anne (so named for the patron saint of the initial pastor's mother) were established in 1886, 1887.

Episcopal services were held in Hopkinton. In Southborough they were held in a stone structure at the Burnett House near Sawin's dam.

The St Marks (named for an Episcopal church in Boston favored by its founder, Joseph Burnett) church cornerstone was set in 1862 on the site of the first post office. Rev. Robert F Cheney was vicar and rector at Saint Marks from 1910-1935. He was a colorful figure from the Berkshires - scoutmaster, philatelist, fisherman; his organist was Charlie LaMar, blind, from Marlborough

Rural Cemetery on Cordaville Rd. was opened in 1844. The site on which the Town House, Pilgrim and Saint Mark churches are located has been traditionally known as Holy Hill. The old cemetery on this hill was used to hide ammunition in the years preceding the Revolution and reputedly contains Indian bones.

Industry

Except for Deerfoot Farm and a few grind dams, the core area of Southborough north of the Boston-Worcester turnpike was never industrial. Industries proliferated in the Fayville and in the Cordaville/Southville sections of town. There was a bonnet factory in Fayville, which burned in the 1860's; Whiting's near White's Corner made brushes; Howe Shoe in Fayville burned in 1864, and was later repaired to house some of the Italian workers who dug the Reservoir. In 1830 there were 31 small industrial plants in town. Boots, shoes and plaster were made in south sections of town. In 1846 Milton Sanford's mill burned and subsequently became the Cordaville Woolen Mill. This Mill remained for many years the biggest taxpayer in town, being replaced in 1889 by Deerfoot Farms. People from southern Southborough also worked in substantial numbers in the Chatanooga Mill, just across the line in Ashland. In short, most industrial development occurred in the south and southeast parts of Southborough. North of the Boston-Worcester Pike stayed residential. Today the town hosts much "clean industry": R&D, high tech and office complexes.

Much of Cordaville and Southville had been part of Framingham and still operated mainly on an east-west axis -eg. hospitals, newspaper, shopping, banking. This was enhanced by the railroad line between Framingham and Westborough while there was, at the time, no direct public transport linkage with the core. It was a long walk to White's Corner to connect! There have been over the years differing orientations and some tensions between the villages (there were many athletic rivalries) but, by and large, except for now and then debate, the town seems united in daily commonwealth.

Through most of its history Southborough was in a sense, two or even three or four towns. It was split three/four ways by the old Boston-Worcester turnpike and by the Reservoir. Its core area, in the north, above the Pike (Route 9), hosted several churches, a few stores, St. Marks, the town buildings, a blacksmith shop, doctor, dentist, a general store, one mill (Rice) in the east and one (Sawin) in the west. This area grew in many ways in an upstairs-downstairs dimension. The rest of town was throughout more egalitarian. Cordaville and Southville might be called mill towns at the outset. Fayville, prior to the Reservoir, boasted several small factories and was also seemingly enroute to more industrial growth. Fayville connected easily, though to a lesser extent so after the Reservoir, with the town core and related, on a north south axis mainly to Marlborough.

Quick Chronicle

**The Town of Southborough is
25 miles from Boston
26 miles south of Fitchburg
190 miles from New York City**

1727-1800

Founding Date - July 17, 1727

October 21, 1730 - Rev Nathaniel Stone was installed as Southborough's minister. A Harvard graduate, his father was minister in Harwich to which parish and town he frequently returned to during his long Southborough ministry. He died in Southborough May 31, 1781. The Boston Gazette described him as "an unbigoted Calvinist...diligent and faithful to the great acceptance of his people" ("Fences of Stone" p. 94)

The Marlborough Association (of area ministers) was active and influential throughout this period. During the French and Indian War of 1756-1757 some refugees were apportioned to Southborough.

1765 -Southborough named a committee to respond to Stamp Act crisis.

1767 - Northborough separated from Westborough.

1774 - Standing Committee of Correspondence established.

1775 - Southborough minutemen went to Concord, too late for battle, but harrassed British troops.

1800-1990

1805-1810 - The Boston Worcester turnpike was built, with a tollgate just east of intersection at Oak Hill Road.

December 17, 1806 - Church was built on the site of meeting house (Holy Hill)

February 10, 1828 - Hail came "as big as English walnuts".

1820 - Joseph Burnett was born; Joel, his uncle, was “the family intellectual”. The name Burnett is from the English name Burnap.

1824 - Southborough Lyceum was started. It was a debating and discussion forum for young men. Formalized in 1828 as The Southborough Franklin Institute.

1825 - General Lafayette visited Southborough, he stayed overnight at the Winchester Tavern on Boston-Worcester Pike.

1840 - The first town house was built on Holy Hill - cost \$17,000. The second was built in 1870 for \$30,000.

1830 - There were 31 industries in town this year.

1852 - Col. Frank Fay donated the core money for the town library, suggesting in his dedication that every library is “a banquet” and “a bouquet”.

1859 - Peters High on Main Street was built on the site of the present Fire Dept. First high school was in the town hall.

1861-1865 During the Civil War 219 men enlisted from Southborough, 33 more than quota. Sanford Mill in Cordaville made blankets for the Union Army.

February 1865 - Henry C. Peters proposed the civil war monument. He donated first 500 gold pieces; he also donated money for maple trees on Main St. and on the Common. The monument, dedicated January 1, 1867, has since been the site of town's annual Decoration (Memorial) Day celebration. Cora Newton headed Soldiers' Aid Society and held the Benefit Assembly Ball and tea parties to defray costs of the monument.

September 13, 1865 - Saint Marks, designed to be a “school under one roof”, officially opened. Named for the St Mark Episcopal church in Boston, with whose pastor its founder, Joseph Burnett, was friendly. Headmaster Rev. Patterson. The first poems of James Russell Lowell were published in the Saint Mark's “Vindex” - See 1868

1866 - Fay school established, run by two cousins of the founder of St. Marks - Harriet Burnett and Eliza Fay. Sometimes referred to as “the nursery” in relation to Saint Marks.

1868 - Rev Dr. Robert Spence Trail Lowell became headmaster at St. Marks. Grammar school built in Fayville, funds raised by Civil War veterans.

1869 - Southborough town house burned.

April 20, 1870 - New town house dedicated.

Choate House architect was grandson of Daniel Webster.

1875 - Schools budget almost \$6,000.

1875 - Agricultural products in Southborough \$197,365 "History of Worcester County" vol II, p.286

1876 - A one room school house was built at the corner of Flagg and Deerfoot Road.

1877 - Semi Tricentennial Committee: Joseph Burnett, Dexter Newton, Curtis Newton, Peter Fay, Sullivan Fay. Dexter Newton in closing the celebration-"Southboro's joys forever flow from arts and agriculture."

The "History of Worcester County" (vol II. Jewett, Boston 1879) said 50 families settled on land which became Southborough in 1727. They petitioned the state legislature thus to become separate from Marlborough. "We are at such a distance from the Place of Public Worship that ourselves but especially our aged, infirm, women and children cannot comfortably endure it". Marlborough endorsed the separation on June 12, 1727 (History of Worcester County) p. 286. Southborough's people "have been and are generally in comfortable circumstances" "there is much wealth here far exceeding per capita income in most other towns" (p. 287). Southborough has long been the wealthiest town in Worcester County. St. Mark's "is said to be the most thorough and disciplined school in the State" (p. 287)

1889 - Deerfoot Farms established. Edward Burnett, president; Robert Burnett, treasurer; William Ward Rogers, superintendent; Seth Collins Howes (my grandfather) was clerk of the corporation. Deerfoot was so named from imprint or residue of a deer's foot found in rock in Stony Brook near the Burnett estate. Mr Burnett, a graduate of Worcester Technical Institute, had an office on India Wharf in Boston and developed what came to be known as Burnett Vanilla Extract.

Metropolitan District Commission land takings for Reservoir - 60 homes taken, 20 moved. 23% of town's land mass; minimal Deerfoot land loss after law suit by Joseph Burnett - only 20 of 2000 acres taken were from Deerfoot.

1893 - First Sears catalogue.

1894 - Flagg school was moved to back of Pilgrim church where it now serves as home for the Southborough Historical Society. William Greenough Thayer came to Saint Marks as headmaster. He was strongly recommended by Rev. Dr. Endicot Peabody, headmaster at Groton. Later in the Fall, came the first St. Marks victory in football over Groton. (In the first Groton game; (Lancaster 1886) Thayer, as Groton master, had made a winning touchdown for Groton).

August 11, 1894 - Joseph Burnett was killed in carriage accident near White's Corner.

1899 - August Belmont donated the main playing field to St. Marks. A fountain there is dedicated in his name.

1900 - The new Peters High is opened on site of the current fire house.

1901 - The American Flag was first raised on MDC island off White's Corner, 4th of July by the Wilson Brothers. The custom continued and continues.

***September 1902** - An article in "New England" magazine by Martha E. D. White described Southborough as: "comfort without luxury, beauty without artificiality, hospitality without ostentation, an ideality of early American dignity and simplicity to a marked degree! Southborough's past has merged into her useful and dignified present" p. 62*

1903 - Trollies passed through White's Corner on thier way to Boston, Worcester, and Marlborough. The fare from White's Corner to Chestnut Hill -5 cents, 1910 - 10 cents, 1919 - 30 cents. First auto in town (Burnett).

1903 - First horseless carriages appeared on Boston-Worcester Pike.

1904 - Long-time doctor, John Henry Robinson died. Dr. J. Lowell Bacon, to become also long-timer, came to Southborough with his parrot, whose voice for many years could be heard all over town center, calling "Doctor!" and announcing patients, etc.

July 27, 1904 - Charles F. Choate said at "Southboro's Triple Celebration"- "Southborough is not to be a manufacturing nor a mercantile town, but is going to remain a farming community and be more broadly recognized as a residential place."("Fences" p.266)

1904 - Deerfoot dairy and sausages moved to Newton Street.

1911- New library was completed near the site of dog pound, house on lot moved across Main Street; library outfitted fully 1913. Miss Fannie Buck was librarian from 1882 to 1912. Sadie Stivers (later Hutt) was librarian from 1914-1966.

1914 - The town core had two buildings. Fire destroyed Masonic Bldg. but left Sealey Building intact. Dexter Newton built the block on the Masonic site which housed post office, drug store and express service.

1915 - Boy Scout Troop #1 met in Episcopal parish hall by old cemetery.

1922 - Charles F. Choate donated Trowbridge-Brigham property across from St Marks Lower Field and original Peters High School to Town as Community House. Mr Choate, also in his will, established a fund to assist Southborough in recreational grants. (Southborough Villager 11/25/93) Choate, a Boston attorney and trustee of the Old Colony RR, was honored when the town named Choate Field on Cordaville Rd. where formal athletic events, a skating rink, Labor Day and all summer sports contests between the sections of town were held. These events echoed earlier annual Firemens Musters in Cordaville, immediatly north of Fitzgerald's store. (This land is now destined to become another town common near the MBTA station) Farmers Field Days and Cattle Shows were held in September/October on the Town House grounds and a several-evening, Spring "variety show", with a director from New York and local casts, were staged annually in the Town Hall.

1927 - My aunt Anne(Howes)Pollard wrote Southborough's 200th anniversiary poem.

1936 - There were 17 scholars in my Peters High School graduating class.

Warner Oland (Charlie Chan) died in Sweden, and was buried in Rural Cemetery. For some time previous Mr and Mrs Oland had lived in Southborough. His tombstone was formerly located near his front door, a spot where he often sat and mused.

1938 - An entire issue of Peters High School "Script" was devoted to Southborough. The annual Peters High Operetta this year was "HMS Pinafore."

September 20, 1938 - Hurricane. Dick Mattioli and I were injured by flying slate from the rail station roof.

After the War - Dr. Timothy Stone came to Southborough from the Army. His office was where previously stood the Johnny Blanchette barber shop. Dentist Dr. Webster was further out on West Main Street.

"Southborough was a lovely little town halfway through the twentieth century. Farms and factories were still the backbone of the local economy. Several small businesses thrived, eg. Englishman John Berry ran the cleaning and pressing shop upstairs in the Sealey block; beneath Berry (formerly George Morrison grocery store and John (Bob) Sealey with his blacksmith shop; next door tanner Hinky Davis; brick grain store half mile south of railway station (where) coal could be purchased; (across tracks) Fitzgeralds ran the Southborough News and Coffee shop,"
("Fences of Stone," p. 274)

Davco Farms started. St Mark church formally became a parish. Long time vicar/rector, Rev Robert F. Cheney passed away.

Frank Ramelli and wife ran the market; George LaBarre (then Hugh McCann) the drug store; Walter Concannon ran a sort of spa and variety store across from Ramellis'. Earlier Lenny Graves managed a First National Store east of Concannons. Earlier still Henry Young (and Jack Hill) for many years ran a grocery store on Main St. opposite the Southborough Arms; Demone, a garage west of the tracks; Carrie Ball a greenhouse on Latisquama Rd; Alton Spurr a garage on Newton Street, a quarter mile up from town center. There were several giant chestnut trees on Main Street.

June 9, 1953 - Tornado, two killed in Fayville.

1955 - "Three Houses" written by Esther Lowell Cunningham Todd.

1956 - National Dairy sold Deerfoot to Hygrade.

1958 - Eleanora (Fantony) Burke, formerly town counsel, became town clerk.

1959 - Algonquin Regional High School opened. Construction of route 495 underway.

1961- Dick Curran became owner of Southborough Spa.

1962 - Master Plan predicted - 6,000 pop. by 1970, possibly 8,000 by 1980; second master plan 1986.

1963 - Construction underway on new Post Office at corner of Main and School streets.

March 1966 - New Post Office open, fire at St. Marks.

1968 - Southborough Players started annual productions.

1967 - "Centennial History of Saint Marks" by Edward Tuck Hall, Stineham Press, Lunenburg, VT. Author cited Benson in earlier "History of Saint Marks" saying "pioneer citizens of Southborough" were "firm, sagacious and temperate," and noting that in 1793 a Rev. Whitney had described the people of Southborough as "industrious, generally wealthy, hospitable and peaceful." An early St. Marks faculty member, cited in Hall's book, saw the town as "healthful and singularly free of objectionable features".

May 1, 1971- Police dept. occupied old Peters High School annex,
Fire dept moved to area.

1973 - MDC said Quabbin and Wachusett reservoir inadequate - restoration of Sudbury reservoir system, and large treatment plant proposed.

1976 - Southborough Conservation Commission made small garden plots available off Deerfoot Road for \$10 each, free for seniors. The practice continued for several years.

1977- 250th Anniversary of founding of our town. Ceremony on Common. (I delivered the centennial address) Southborough Recreation annual Road Races begun.

1978 - Dept of Interior: Southborough is official name of Our Town

September 1979 - First issue of "The Southborough Villager"

1980 - Mary E. Finn awarded "Citizen of the Year" by Rotary Club; she had taught in town for more than 50 years. Likewise, Margaret A. Neary for both of whom schools were named 1954 and 1970.

August 1982- Southborough Cultural Arts Center-South Union School Bldg.

Mid 1980s - Main Street Association formed to preserve small town character of Main Street. Business Zoning category particularly applicable in town center.

1986 - Gazebo built on former site and dedicated to alumni of Peter's High School.

1987 - Rev. John Chane came to St Mark's church, transferred to cathedral in San Diego, then became Episcopal bishop of Washington, D.C on May 1, 2002.

March 20, 1987-"Planning Strategy for Southborough" prepared by Southborough Master Plan Committee; "many of Southborough's problems are due to conditions in other communities": e.g. traffic and "affordable housing" "Southborough's resources of land and water are being extravagantly used by development" (p. 12). Report called for continued involvement in Metrowest (Southborough is only Worcester County town so connected). Considerations of impact fees and urgency for open space action were addressed in the plan.

1987,1988 - Hydro electric plant: Fayville dam

1989 - Selectman Bill Baker said major issues facing town are “growth and future of MDC land”

1990 - 2002

Most, but by no means all, of what I have so far chronicled came from “Fences of Stone.” Again, I applaud Nick Noble and refer my readers to his pages for further detail on many of the matters I chronicle. From here on I have done my own research and reporting. My sources have been primarily annual **Town Reports** and the pages of **The Southborough Villager** and its successor **The Northborough Southborough Villager**.

The last decade in the 20th century in our town focused mainly on issues of growth, traffic, water and schools. The question of our high school future was mooted much and resolved only in the early years of the 21st century. We wrestled throughout with two regional groups-MWRA, (Metropolitan Water Resource Authority) in the matter of water, and MBTA, Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority) in the matter of trains. We confronted and perhaps somewhat solved the question of “affordable housing.” We rejected town sewers, hoping as best we might to preserve our village character. We built or renovated schools. We sought better to safeguard our few remaining open spaces.

What follows is a chronicle of some of the things that we did and that were done to us in the final years of the 20th and the opening years of the 21st centuries. This can and hopefully does provide my reader with the flavor of these bustling years though, obviously, it cannot exhaust them. Again, I refer that reader to the annual **Town Reports** and to **The Southborough Villager** and now **The Northborough Southborough Villager** as primary sources of how we were. *All of these are in the Library; the help of Judith Williams and her staff I most gratefully salute! As Southborough celebrates its 275th birthday, the library celebrates its 150th.

POPULATION

1990 - 6,530

1992 - 6,783

1995 - 7,279

1997 - 7,432 (of whom 1,425 were 55 and over)

2001 - 9,000 (est)

1991 - Town Report dedicated to Sadie (Stivers)Hutt, long time town librarian. It noted that Sadie had started work at the library under another long time librarian, Fannie Buck, two months after graduation from Peters High School. It called her “guardian of the library for half a century..she touched many hearts and helped mould the Southborough of today.”

February 6, 1992 - Berlin and Boylston declined to join Algonquin Regional School.

1992 - Proposal for “affordable housing” on Parkerville Rd.

March 9, 1992 - “Outdoor Southborough” publication about open space, trails, rec situation (Peter Kallender): hearings MWRA project.

September 1, 1992 - Opposition to widening Oak Hill and Central streets in Fayville.

March 1992 - Southborough fire and police chiefs rejected the idea of central dispatching in the area.

April 12, 1992 - Article on Leo Bertonazzi, as he retired from management of Rural Cemetery. He said it had been an Indian burying ground and that the first white person buried there was Margaret Newton in 1728. Film star Warner Oland (Charlie Chan) is buried here. Leo designed the town flag.

April 23, 1992 - Fire chief Peter Phaneuf, retiring, quoted in column as saying “the stones you see (around the Reservoir) were handcut by Italian immigrants.”

1993 - Town meeting defeated sewer study article, one voter said

“if you want to change the rural nature of the town, vote for the study.”
(The Southborough Villager 11/4/93 p. 1)

1993 - Two surviving WWI veterans-Charles Fantony and David Watkins. Charles Parker had been the Town's last surviving Civil War veteran. George Firman, British veteran of Boer War had lived on Walker Street.

April 11, 1993 - MBTA station in Cordaville more likely as Ashland rejected station. Selectmen - “we continue to experience a building boom-this is a two edged sword”. Route 85 bridge out of service near Cozy Corner. Conservation Commission in Town Report: “biggest issue-growing school population”.

April 28, 1993 - Protest at Harvard U. Primate Research Center (in far NE section of town, off Parmenter Street) continued - questions of sewerage and animal rights, The Primate Center also is in Marlborough.

1993 - Community profile by MA Department for Communities and Development: Southborough is 96.5% white; income 50% higher than state average; 84% of commuters drive to work, 6.2% carpool, average for each commute 23.3 minutes.

Spring 1994 - At a conference on suburbia at First Church in Bedford, MA, pastor John Gibbon introduced it saying “we must decide on the appropriate structure for edge cities - we are acting as if we are towns in the nineteenth century.”

September 1996 - **The Southborough Villager** reported new septic tank- Colonial Gardens

November 27, 1996- Special Town Meeting voted for School Building Commission.

1997 - New post office to be located on Cordaville Rd south of Route 9.

1997 - “Friday Seminars” at St Marks open to public.

1997 - MBTA station at juncture of 495 and MA pike “unfeasible for environmental reasons.” Cordaville station need increased. Outreach person hired for Colonial Gardens.

January 22, 1998 - Question of future of Algonquin continued moot e.g **The Southborough Villager** column by Kelly Roney: "losing the regional school would be bad for Southborough-staying will cost a significant amount of money. Leaving would cost more especially in educational enrichment." "Algonquin High Split Continues" (Southborough Villager 1/22/98 p.l.) "Boards Talk of Regional Split-Officials Will Meet" (Southborough Villager 1/29/98 p.l.)

January 29, 1998 - Town House renovations.

1999 - MWRA tunnel project 70% complete, to be operational in late summer 2003.

2000 - Town Report identified 36 committees, 10 commissions, 7 boards and 3 councils formally reporting to town. New land needed for Rural Cemetery. Building Dept. said yearly growth rate in Southborough was 1.9% and there were 3,119 units. \$25,000. study authorized of community center at Fayville Village Hall to include house next door.

2001 - The Northborough Southborough Villager reported full course lunches are served Monday-Friday at Senior Center (Fayville Village Hall) by June Phillippo, whose mother Alice had started the practice, \$2 per meal.

2001 - The Northborough Southborough Villager December 28,2001 profiled United Parishes of Southborough food pantry operated out of Pilgrim church.

2001- Town Report noted Town and Library anniversaries. Metro Water Supply Tunnel-17.6 mile tunnel complete. Chestnut Hill Water Treatment Plant operational Fall/2004; \$25,000 recommended-for study of "aging infrastructure"at Southborough Art Center. Concern that MBTA Cordaville station should open simultaneously with Ashland and Westborough lest there be traffic gluts in Cordaville. Study of "triangle" north of Cordaville station as a "town common"

Personal Recollect

I was born a few years after my father became Postmaster in Our Town. I was a day hop at Holy Cross. It wasn't until I went to St. Louis University for graduate studies in history in the Fall of 1940 that I ever much left town. Since then, there were fifty months in the Army, six years in le Grand Seminaire in Montreal, a few local ministries, a year as assistant to Father James Keller at the Christophers in New York City, eight years teaching city and regional planning at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. and then more than two decades as a circuit rider consulting with American and Canadian (Arch)dioceses as a professional (graduate degree from MIT) pastoral planner.

I had long since boasted that if I had not been born near Boston as soon as I reached the age of reason, I would have moved here. As I criss-crossed the North American continent, I fell in love with many people in many distant and different geographies. Still, I had also long since resolved to retire on the MBTA, and I never saw anything better than what we have right here in middle and east Massachusetts! (And this is how my father felt who "never went nowhere" and who told it to me often as we walked the hills, fields and waters of Our Town!) All of my travel time I remained a legal resident and proud devotee of Our Town retuning to it as often as possible.

It should be noted, though, that my home was behind the Catholic church in center Southborough. Hence, throughout this text, I will be minimally conscious of, and explicit about what was occurring and how in the Cordaville and Southville sections of town. As more than one older resident of Southborough center told me recently "there was no public transportation, no bus or anything, we seldom went over there". I say this as fact, not in derogation of the southern parts of town.

My purpose in this recollect is, once I set the details, to describe what it was for a boy growing up in Our Town - the way we then were! The selection of what to record, and how is strictly my responsibility. I regret any omissions, any errors. I try here simply to let loose some flavor of how I experienced life in this place, in those days - no more, no less.

When I am asked - where did you get your erudition, your book love- I respond without hesitation. Sadie Stivers, my parents and the St. Marks dump! Both my mother and father were great readers and writers. Sadie was always much more than a traffic cop for books in the Fay Library. She was a stalwart Queen of the stacks, suggesting books, inquiring how they read and all that, a very personal mentor as it were. But it was from the dump every late May or early June that my own library came. At the end of term, the Lion kids would throw away their books. I would go eagerly with a big bag, collect dozens of volumes, catalogue them. It was also from this source, whence incidentally came much of our local athletic equipment, that I started being a peripatetic literateur - and never stopped. As a pious gypsy later, I seldom bought books, but again and again I haunted libraries en route and en passant!

Each month in my calendar growing up was special. In January and February there was sliding, snow forts, bombing snow cities and later some tobogganing on the St Marks golf course and skating outings on the St Marks rink. And then the annual St, Marks play in Benson Hall. Seed catalogues next. They came in bunches to my father's post office in late January and early February. Many people simply tossed them in the wastebasket. I picked them up, and for weeks through sleet and slush I gloried in visions of what might happen in my backyard, but, of course, never did so well. In late February, their feet wet but free of snow at last, pussy willows grew in the state land and behind Fay School. We always Sunday sought out and welcomed these harbingers of Spring. We cut and brought bunches home, selling some en route to cars driving by on Framingham Road. Like we did every Fall with bittersweet. Like we did most winters with ground greens and little red berries for wreathes and garlands. The first sign of spring was skunk cabbage green in the brook below what we called Conder's Hill on the north side of eastern East Main Street. My grandfather Jim Burke often brought us Vermont maple candies on Sundays in mid-Lent after church when, of course, it was OK to consume sweets.

And my father likewise on such Sundays made us kites from newspaper and flour paste and we tied rags together for tales; and we tramped up Conder's Hill and flew them grandly (and little balsa airplanes too) in fields more and more blooming bluets. On 19 April, Paul Revere (Patriots) Day, my father took me and my brother down by train to Framingham where we watched the Boston Marathon (our heroes were successively Charlie Demars and Johnny Kelly), had lunch in a cafeteria and went to the movies in the very fancy St. George Theater. Altogether a grand event indeed!

We knew where they were hiding and we thought how it was wonderful to find lady slippers growing again down by The Reservoir and to have first picnics, though it was illegal, on the sandy shore nearby. It was soon time to order fireworks out of a little red catalogue. We did so from Marston and Wells in Ohio. I, as the oldest, had most choice. We sent away and waited impatiently for the big red box to arrive at the post office. And on the night of the Fourth we invited our neighbors over to Upland Road to watch our display. Summer, early on was mostly St. Marks swimming pool time. We walked the path through the pripet hedges, past the Belmont Fountain and enjoyed many a good hour of fun and sun courtesy of St. Mark, the winged Lion.

Later there were similar outings at the Fay School pool and in Fayville just across The Reservoir. Each Spring, Mother, with much advice and seeds and plants from grandfather Jim Burke, did her floral best. We always tried vegetables, without much success out back. I noticed over the years that Mother bought us onion sets more and more. In time I realized that these are almost impossible to kill and that their growth encouraged eager young bucolic hearts even if the beans and tomatoes failed. For me otherwise, there was reading and many hours of permit tennis on the Fay courts. Summers were also distinguished by blueberry picking and selling with subsequent weekend train excursion trips through Framingham to Nantasket Beach - if we did well, or Revere, if we were then less opulent, How much we enjoyed the ferries and the narrow guage trains once we were across Boston Harbor! In the Fall there were pumpkins. We walked down and got ours from

Onthanks, below what is now Bose. My father first carved them for us grim and glad, though later we took over. Hallowe'en was a big deal even then and there! When I was old enough, I delivered "specials" for my father that were letters and packages with special stamps on them. They required Hand Delivery and had to be signed for. I took many up to St. Marks, Fay School and places in the West End. Specials were particularly numerous just before Christmas. As we delivered them, me and my sled often paused to reflect under the town Christmas Tree which had been planted on the Community House lawn in 1922. Money from this fueled presents and helped my mother purchase a dozen or so roses which, then, I distributed in her name, one each, to our sick or simply geriatric friends.

Church was an important part of my growing up. We lived on Upland Road where only "the pines" separated us from St. Anne's Catholic church. The "pines" were for us kids a wonderland, square with perhaps two acres of rocks, tall trees and swamp. They have since become houses, but then they were places to hide, to meet, to build snow forts and dams, to play glassies, to climb high and generally to do kid stuff with neighbor children. For pastors at the church we were a great find, altar boys next door. (Besides my mother was organist and soloist) They called on us often, even for the 5:30 AM Mass on First Friday. We served St Anne novena evenings and mornings, ending on her day July 26, and sometimes, if we were lucky, Midnight Mass at Christmas. There being no parochial school in town, we did our catechism on Saturdays. And our folks insisted we never miss. We said the stations with Mother every day in Lent and rejoiced when year after year, irrespective of the pastor's ethnic lineage, she sang "All Praise to St Patrick" from the little choir loft where for many years she presided. On May 24 1951 Bishop John Wright ordained me in St Anne church, the first private ordination in the new diocese. I was and remain the only Southborough born boy to become a diocesan priest. Sidney MacNeil, who had lived on Howes Court had earlier become a Jesuit priest.

Even in high school, I wrote a lot. Indeed, a neighbor child going by our porch and seeing me dubbed me "*pencil weary*." I so often had pen or pencil and paper in hand. What started me I am not sure, though one of its earlier manifestations came in response to My Friend Abroad ads in a boys magazine. I corresponded with girls in Austria

and in Westphalia, Germany, and with boys in Holland and Australia. The need to spell out for them how it was for me, early on, stimulated my powers of observation and for their part they stimulated an abiding interest in travel and “the world beyond”. During the big War my father wrote me long letters describing things in Our Town, likewise in Montreal, St. Louis etc. Responding again triggered many pens and pencils. I started doing poetry in Greenland during the War, continued some in Germany and in the seminary. But this part of me really flourished in the several parishes where I initially served and later in my several ministries and places across the continent. I guess in any case, the sobriquet “pencil weary” was and remains accurate even if now my instrument is not lead but a computer!

I have already cited St. Marks for its literary dump and as, albeit furtive, source of some of our athletic gear. The school meant much more to me growing up and in school only one fence away from it. From the very start. Though there were, of course, some tensions, the School was open to the Town. It, unlike Groton, had no walls. In the first place, my father was postmaster; we were thus often invited to School events like Prize Day, plays, lectures (I met Arthur Fiedler at one of these). As special delivery lad, also, I was again and again at and in the school getting to know Dorothy Herrick, long time executive secretary to the headmaster real well. We knew also townies working at the School like Mike Maley, Joe Mauro, Vic Rossi. And many of the “girls” who waited, cleaned, sewed etc. went to our church and every school year Sunday masters like Eaton and then Bill Glavin brought Catholic St. Markers down to worship with us. There was also the sport dimension. We almost idolized the blue/white boys. I took in nearly all of the home games. The annual Groton baseball meet in Spring and football contest in the Fall was, of course, the highlight of my year. Since the games were played alternately here and there getting a ride up to Groton twice every other year was always a difficulty and a priority. Whenever St Marks won, there was a huge parade through town led by a band, often from

the Sons of Italy in Marlborough, cheering at stores and in front of the Choate house and other master's quarters, the team in a blue and white wagon pulled by lower formers and a bonfire over back. And I remember how in the years when FDR was sweeping the polls, the delight of many St Marks kids and masters after they could shout when we beat Groton (FDR's prep school) - at least we trounced him on the field! So much did the School mean to me that when I was later called to judge a debate with Groton, it broke my heart to have to pick the Grotties as winners but I compensated by voting a St. Marks lad best speaker. Besides the only girl to whom I hung May baskets in high school was the lovely daughter of a St. Mark's master!

Postscript

My father was the eldest son of Seth Collins Howes and Kate Lavelle Howes. His father came from a very old Chatham (Pleasant Bay) family to Natick to make baseballs and subsequently to Our Town where he became clerk of Deerfoot Farms and active in town politics. He was tall, straight, reticent of words and a stickler for honesty and integrity. He never lost his Cape Cod twang. His wife Kate was a jovial sort, gregarious and witty. I recall that she said she loved blueberries each time I came to sell a basket and even preferred huckleberries when those were all I had! The family lived successively on what is now Howes Court, off Newton near the town center, on East Main Street and in the big white house on the SW corner of Main and Latisquama Rd. Grandfather remained a Protestant till his death bed, Grandma was Catholic and her children as well.

My mother was the eldest daughter of James Burke born at Clarinbridge in the County Galway and Mary Agnes Donahue born in Southborough. Jim was the first and senior Burke to come over, followed by two sisters who settled in Lynn and one brother in Somerville. I never knew her but the window on the east side of St Anne's church nearest the altar is dedicated to her by name (Burke like Lavelle is in origin Norman Irish). James Burke became the head formal gardener on the Sears estate where he also ran the greenhouse, which stood just in front of the artist studio at the extreme SW part of the property, across the street from the white house in which he lived and my mother was born.

Many of my poems were published in the old **Boston Herald's** "Top of the Morning" column on Saturday mornings in the 1950's and 1960's. Subsequently many were published in **The Southborough Villager**:

From **The Southborough Villager**:

"Today we introduce the poetry of Rev. Robert G. Howes. The Rev. Howes writes that, while his ministry takes him all around the country, he remains a legal and loyal resident of Southborough. His father was long-time Postmaster, his uncle Town Solicitor. The Rev. Howes gave the address on the common on the occasion of Southborough's 250th anniversary back in 1977, and has published two books of poetry, which are often seasonal in theme."

Kingdom Kept

He was king
and she was queen
and autumn
was country enough to keep
of a wind-away day
in fall.

He stacked the sheaves
in the upland sun;
and he smoked his pipe
where the stonewalls ran
up the back of his pumpkin piles.

She sat in her kitchen
and the harvest marched by
from the jelly shelves
to the apple pies.

And once of a while
when the night came down
they stood arm-in-arm
at the brink of the sky
and shared with the stars
the happy rule
of a wind-away day,
of a kingdom kept.

Poet

Mine are the muscles of music.
I do simply day by day
the gymnastries of fancy.

I can't take steel
and bend it shining
into shapes
for men to marvel in.

Still I can let laughter
into a window of worry.
I can be moons and moods.

I can't run roads
for cities to ride in and out on.
I can't myself
persuade otherwise
one single inch of time.
I conjure no commotion
in the latitudes of power.

Still I keep the substance
of which all this bright and bravery
is but the shadow.

To post flags on high horizons,
to write rhymes and reason
around their sweat,
their weights and measures
and money,
this I think
is the magic I make.

Town Clock

I sit
the mood of seasons
through
in my steeple
of weather
and wind.

I am yesterday
and tomorrow
and the master
of today.

I climb
from stores to stars,
from picket fences
up the rim
of country skies
to God.

I am
the keeper of the conscience
of the hills.
I am welcome.
I am warning.

I am eternity
ticking
in the midst
of you.

Milestone

Like some sentinel
left over from an antique army,
I stand by the road,
present indicative
of how far it is
to somewhere
men needed once
to know the distance to.

My task is simple.
I do not calculate.
I do not plow.
I only witness here
to permanence and patience.
In the rain and the rush of seasons,
I hold my silent signal
like a lighthouse
on a much-remembered rock.

All around me's variance
and vanity.
Traveler, look at me.
I'm certain as anything on earth can be.

Look and know
that something stays
beyond the reach of change,
that something's still and always true,
no matter calendars,
no matter clocks.

(There are two milestones in Southborough, one east on Main Street in front of the house where my father once lived, the other west on Main Street at its intersection with Sears Road near where my mother was born.)

Consider the Sparrow

There is One
Who cares for sparrows
where they fly
lest they fall,
in Whose universal hand
nests and stars
are balanced equally.

There is One
Who cares if sparrows sing,
His the providence.
The keeping of a bird
in winter in a hungry frost
is not ours to calculate.

Yet, when we sweep
a platform clean from storm
and take our daily bread
and break it small
for January sparrows
begging in the snow,
and wipe the ice
from kitchen windows
to see the banquet held,
who can doubt He meant
that we should help.

When men are big enough
to care for little things
in winter on the wing,
who can doubt He knows
and smiles to see it done!

(For my brother, F. Peter, and Lill)

Midwinter Day

One by one the light goes out
of sky and snow
like candles
in some cold window
when the wax is done.

Yet in this, the earliest dark,
man makes no fire in circles
like once he did
at oak trees
in a worship woods.
No incantation
calendars midwinter day
in this, the atom age.

Still something in us
estimates an omen in the wind.
Something counts the minutes
till the hill is climbed
and we're sure again
the other side is sun.

Somebody's Dog

He wasn't mine with his face full of frost
and his tail in a drift.

He wasn't even anyone's I know.

His collar said quite simply
he was somebody's dog.

The snow was too thick to see.

Somebody later would call from the porch.
Somebody later would reach down
a bowl of meat and a chunk of love,
to his spot by the stove in a house somewhere.

Somebody's dog!

Somebody's children patted him proud.

In the need of the night
he was somebody's guard,
somebody's excuse, perhaps,
for being kind to creation
of a winter day with wind.

Somebody's dog
shaking his shaggy soul in the snow.

I nodded to him a little on the way.

He wagged me back hello—and thanks.

Then as if remembering he was

somebody's dog not mine,
he turned, looking long eyes at me a minute
to be sure I wasn't hurt,
that I knew he had to run,
he turned and hurried off
in somebody's direction,
hoping somebody wouldn't mind too much
that he'd been away a bit
talking to the neighbors
of a winter day in somebody's town.

Seed Book

Before the pussy willows start
the seed books come.

In a commotion
of slush and sleet
with fires inside and fury out
the pinwheels of wonder spin again
on the posts of possibility.

Sooner than robins
in the pages of this promise
by winter windows
tomorrow begins.

Sooner than crocuses,
but not much,
the seed books come
like a bombardment of rainbows
exploding in a storm
nearly done.

Country Postmaster

I am trains panting
in prairie dawns.
I am wings and ships
and feet on streets.

I am Christmas bending
under bags of bells.

I am clock towers tolling time.
I am arrows pointing distance
and who lived where and when
and why they went to what.

I am winged horses
and purveyor
to the looms of love.

I am hands shaking
I am windows opening out,
I am seeds
in February catalogues.

I am merchant of moods
and teller of tales.

I am government articulate.
I am proof
that towns need touch with towns.
I am the brotherhood of man
leaning on the counter
sorting mail
at ten o'clock.

(For my father)

Middle March

In a clamor of cold and crocus
the world begins
to anticipate baseball
and to recollect robins.

Now and then
between the bluster and the blow
spring erupts
in a clitter clatter
of baby carriages and kites.

The main thing's the melting!

Something's up.
Yesterday runs off
in great gullies of rain.
Women shake out rugs
and men think forward thoughts
with rakes.

In the forests of time
the limbs are old
but the sap is young
in middle March.

Marbles

In a pine wood
with clumps of snow
still showing,
there's a marble hole
and one boy
and one girl.

All afternoon
while winter decays around them
they build their bags of conquest
less and more
as the toss decides.

This ritual,
these balls of brightness
rolling in the mud,
this combat of colors
in an after-school sun—
these, much as pussy willows,
much as kites,
these are spring.

(with fond memories of “the pines” on Upland Road)

Spring Flower Show

Like a bombful of rainbows
exploding in a dark sky
this is spring.

In a crescendo of daffodils
when the world
is barely come to pussy willows
this is tomorrow.

In a universe
surfeited with brown thaw
and secondhand snow
this is yellow jubilee.

And all the time
through the corridors of color
men come and go
in overcoats,
with flash bulbs
and memories of May.

Spring

The smoke from chimneys
in a chunk of farm
beginning to break free again
runs ragged
up the east wind.

Two small boys
and a collie dog
put snow together
in a rut with mud
and make a dam.

In a window
on the sunset side
an old cat sits,
yellow in the last of day
and ponders his paws.

In the wood lot
where the brook begins
the ice goes out
with a silver sibillance
and pussy willows
fly like flags
in slender towers.

Meanwhile
along the bank
with marbles and kites for company,
the world sits
on a volcano of robins.

May Storm

Through new green woods
the black wind goes.

There's thunder
in the daffodils.

Across the pink
of fragrant apple fields
lightning's loose.

Just yesterday
one might have guessed
spring's too sweet a wonder
for anything
but sun and pastel petals.

Still the planet's jaundiced
with fault original.
Even the prettiest May
needs proof
of imperfection.

High School Graduation

None noticed much before.
The road we went
was a single matter mostly
growing up
of no major moment to the world.

Now all at once,
here in our temple of tassels,
they congregate their dreams in us.
They speak long hopes.
They hand us horizons
with some apology
and many wistful wisdoms.

None noticed much before.
Now all at once
they call us giants.

Surely, we shall stretch us
tall as may be tall.
But can we reach the stars
they failed to find themselves
who sat here other Junes?

And in fact
if there's a planet needs redemption
why tomorrow morning's
soon enough to start.
Tonight has backward faces.
Leave us but a minute more
in these old, honest places
where we laughed and loitered
a single matter growing up
of no major moment to the world.

(for all Peters High School alumni - SKOAL)

The Hawk Tree

We call it the hawk tree,
no one questions why.
Someone years ago
must have seen a hawk
sitting at twilight
or thought he did.
Anyhow it's been the hawk tree
ever since.

A stranger riding past
might call it an old oak
simply this and nothing more
standing highest
in a woods somewhere
but there's lots of things
that seem ordinary
only they aren't actually
if you grow up with them.

The hawk tree takes the sun
first at dawn.
The hawk tree's closest
up to stars
and bravest in storms.
It makes a perfect permanent, besides,
for kids to steer by
when they're lost
for camps and being goal
in Giant Steps.

The truth isn't what counts so much
or how a story starts.

What matter's making the world
a near and neighbor sort of thing.

We call it the hawk tree,
no one questions why.
If you asked though,
I guess this is about what we'd say
for sense and certainty.
OK?

Midsummer

In the pond
up a willow road
two boys swim
with tan toes
and bicycles.

In pastures
the smell is sunshine
from new hay crew-cut
with margins of Queen Anne's lace.

This is the middle magic.
This is eternity
from buttercups halfway
to MacIntosh.

You can almost hear
the Hubbards grow.

This is abundance.
In fat fields
the longitude is lilies,
the latitude is hummingbirds
and fireflies.

Old Cemetery

This is the old place.
There's Indians in that corner over there.
No one comes.

The stars are the only mourners now
and squirrels sometimes when we sleep
and now and then a butterfly beginning.

Time was folks fussed with flowers and flags.
And each Decoration Day
they made a congregation
by the mother maple—
she was somewhat younger then—
and the preacher prayed a prayer.

Now I guess
the new one's all that counts,
the neat, new one with the proper stones
and perpetual care.
The glory's gone from us
like moonlight
when the sun's another way.
Only a car stops seldom
to see what's what
and scratch and speculate
and sometimes poets pause
in the grass by the gate
and ponder permanence.

This is the old place.
No one comes—
not any more.

We've only rain and rest,
wonder and wisdom
where we wait,
the sense of seasons simply
from April through to goldenrod
and back.

But the wind is still from heaven.
We'll hear the trumpet just as clear.
You'll see.

Paper Boy

I'm the world
in a white bag with red letters
on a bicycle.

I'm eternity
whistling down your street.

I'm freckles smiling
in the midst of international decision.
I'm headlines,
bulletins and bargains
and what a pound of cabbage costs.
I keep the count of Little Leagues
and who's the president of what
and where and when.

In sun and shade,
through wind and rain,
I peddle in a path
great men have peddled in before,
and when I've done the job
and all the neighbors know,
my little dog and I
go back to being kids again
lighter of the secrets of the world,
with woods to re-investigate
and model planes to paint.

I'm your paper boy.

Country Kid

I have friends forever new forever old
in fields and frogs
My brothers are the brooks.
I am, I think, related to the rain
and cousin somehow, to December stars.

I know the mysteries of moonlight
on crystal crusts of snow.
I know the ways the wind has
in the notch behind the barn.
I know where the pussy willows grow
and where the wild nuts fall.

My toys are robin eggs
cracked blue on the grass in May
and pumkins
and rabbits in a frozen briar patch
and kites across the pastureland
and pollywogs and such.
I play with pines and fishing rods;
birches are my hobby
and maple sap in Lent
and making dams in the mud in March.

And sometimes too
I sit on a rock out back
and think and dream and wonder
at the wideness of the world,
at ships and seas
and airoplanes and guns.
But, then,
softly as the wind in oak trees
something whispers in my soul
and I forget again
and whittle whistles
all the afternoon
and investigate the sky
and try to guess
how oaks were acorns once
and the world is God's.

Pig nut bag

His is the width
of the woods on the hill
the crinkle of oaks
in a whisper wind.

His is the walk
of the cider moon,
the silence of stars
in a mutter of leaves.

Fourteen faith
and the sumach sky,
his is the world
in a pig nut bag.

First Day of School

Everything was ready
and all the things the book said
should be said were said.

Neither looked the least bit sad
when the last good-bye was waved
and one was out and the other in.

Still where she went
in the golden wind,
something tugged at the heart of her heart;
and she reached a hand down
and no one reached up.
And when she came home,
she looked out back
at the swing blowing bare
in the goldenrod,
and she sighed as if
a flag had come down
and none had risen instead.

And the little one sat
at the bright, big desk
and she tried to remember
not to be afraid or alone or anything,
like the book said she should,
and teacher told her
how nice she looked
just before she cried.

On the first day of school
books are so useless.

A Noise of Swings

Six kids went up and down
once on noisy swings
in Central Park
someone had apparently forgotten
to provide with recent oil

It made no matter surely
to the fun and fancy
that these were organized, urban swings
or to the fundamental poetry in the event.

Indeed, such acapella exercise might even be
be better in terms of mood and muscle
than merely silent calisthenics.
In any case there was a double delight
in my senses going by
I saw them happy personal
I heard the public metal laughing

On the other hand memorably I prefer rope
impromptu on an old limb
in some plain private place
and a wood seat (hand made)
with a boy like me in short pants
enjoying it, but neither of us boasting
or needing to say out loud
how good swinging is
when you're little and loose
with sneakers in a country Spring.

And no rust, no honks, no traffic
and no store bought squeaky metal.

(With memories of many simple Southborough swings, particularly
the one which hung for many good years on a long rope at the Burnett
house just beyond Sawin's Dam on the left going up Deerfoot Road.)

Eleventh Month

Once in November I sat under an old maple tree
on Clear Hill in Our Town.
I counted two leaves only left
like skull rings on black fingers
where it stood skeletal in an obituary of wind
and a sobriety of horizons.

Free of frills and falderol,
the eleventh month comes full cycle
from blizzards and fat barns
Fourth of July and beaches,
the bravado of hollyhocks, roses and goldenrod
back to the basics of bittersweet,
sumach, milkweed and red ivy stone walls.

November's a company of saints,
soldier souls and Pilgrims
There's no hoopla in it, no charlatans,
no sonnets, no spin,
It marches meanwhile only to the drumbeat
of bare branches, fundamental distances
and cold, uncomplicated stars.
What you see is what you get!

I myself saw far that day even as far
as Framingham and some Boston
I saw clear and clean
like giants, patriots and All Hallows do

And thus I knew again how it needs
must be for me and all things else
till the sap runs green once more
up the trunks of Creation.
and there's pussy willows in the swamp.

(I was born on 15 November, the feast of St. Albert the Great.)

Viking Verse

To go and go
and go again
bright and brave
beyond the farthest far.

To sail
through steady and storm
from skerry to skerry
till Vinland the Good
brothers strong
in a dragon ship
under the Great Star
and never fear and never falter

To dream
when the Northern Lights
stand tall and terrible above me
and the bowl and the skoal
go round and round
of old Norrøya behind
and Valhalla ahead

This be my lot
to wander loose
and wonder free
restless of restraint
the seeking in my soul,
the wit of worlds
in my mind
the swords of wisdom
in my hands and the oars
of both faith and fancy
courageous in my heart
out beyond the beyond
again and again...

Until at last in some final fjord
where the Master Mariner makes
His high and everlasting harbor
my boat is beached
and I am home from horizons
forever.

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